

# PREFERRED WORKER Adviser

Winter 2001

Information for Preferred Workers who haven't yet used their return-to-work incentives

## What do the new preferred worker program rules mean to you? \_\_\_\_\_

by David Onheiber

Effective October 1, some Preferred Worker Program rules changed. To bring you up to date, here is a summary of the rule changes that affect requests for program benefits:

### **Timelines for requesting program benefits**

**If you receive your Preferred Worker Program identification card while your claim is open, and then you start a new job and request premium exemption and wage subsidy:**

You and the employer must complete the preferred-worker identification card and the wage-subsidy-agreement form and send them to the division within 90 days of the job start date.

**If you receive a preferred-worker identification card while your claim is open and go back to your regular job, which your employer has modified because of your permanent injury-caused restrictions:**

To request premium exemption and wage subsidy, you and the employer must complete the preferred-worker identification card and the wage-subsidy-agreement form and send them to the division within 90 days of the job start date. A program consultant will determine whether the job has been "substantially modified." If the consultant determines the job is "substantially modified," premium exemp-

tion and wage subsidy will be effective the date on which the job started.

**If you request worksite-modification assistance so that you can go back to your regular job:**

After the modification is in place, a re-employment consultant will visit the worksite to determine whether the modification is substantial. If the consultant determines the job is "substantially modified," premium exemption and wage subsidy will start the date on which the consultant makes the determination. You and the employer have 90 days from the date of the

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## Success story *By Dan Gammon* \_\_\_\_\_

**Frank**, a 57-year-old hot-air-balloon pilot, injured his legs when the passenger basket hit a tree, detached from a balloon, and fell 90 feet. At Oregon Health Sciences University, doctors replaced one of his crushed vertebrae with an artificial one. His injury resulted in a loss of use of both legs.

The Preferred Worker Program (PWP) determined that Frank had an exceptional disability and found him eligible for its benefits. Frank, who had been out of the computer business for five years, upgraded his skills by completing Web and desktop publishing training.

A convenience food distributor expressed an interest in hiring Frank because of his computer skills and knowledge of computer applications in marketing and communications.

The employer's difficulty in making a commitment to Frank was that all office workspace was on the second floor. Additionally, the job would require Frank to travel to customer's workplaces to market his employer's services and help customers connect to the employer's not-yet-functioning on-line ordering system.

After a brainstorming session, a PWP consultant, the employer, and Frank agreed to reorganize the food-packaging area and construct office space for Frank's computer equipment in the warehouse on the first floor. An electric door opener was installed at the warehouse's front entrance to allow Frank access to his new office space.

The PWP approved the purchase of a mobility cart and a hydraulic lift that Frank could use to transport the cart in his van. This modification al-

lows Frank to interact with customers at their sites, and to transport equipment.

Frank's office is now complete. He has created an interactive Web site for customers who place daily orders for food items and manages an integrated accounting system.

Because Frank has an exceptional disability, he was able to offer his employer a one-year wage subsidy that reimburses his employer 75 percent of his wages during this period.

Frank says he has achieved full rehabilitation and is "armed and dangerous." Although he misses the thrill of flying, he feels fulfilled in his new job. His recovery and sense of economic and personal independence have compensated for the satisfaction he felt as he piloted a balloon. ■

# Meet Rand Schledorn



Rand Schledorn is on a job rotation as a reemployment consultant for the Reemployment Assistance Unit in Medford. Rand provides workers and employers in Southern Oregon with worksite modification assistance and handles wage-subsidy, obtained-employment, and premium-exemption casework.

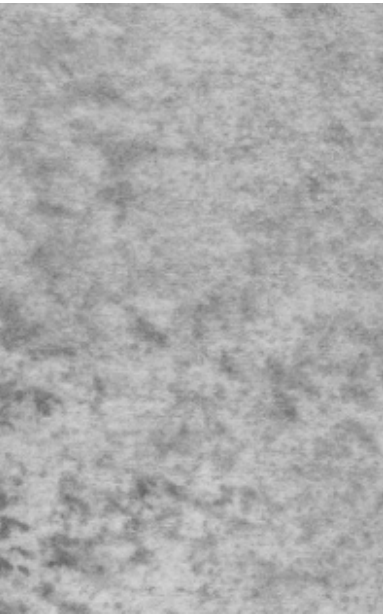
Rand earned a bachelor's degree in psychology from UCLA and a master's degree in education from Idaho State University. Rand also attended Southern Oregon University in Ashland and completed core curriculum in accounting.

Rand began his employment with the Workers' Compensation Division in 1979. He has held several vocational positions with WCD, and has managed the Medford office for the past 20 years. Rand worked with the predecessor to the current Preferred Worker Program, providing wage subsidy and

worksite-modification assistance. Rand is excited about providing assistance to southern Oregon's injured workers and employers under the new Preferred Worker Program.

Rand and his wife Christie live in Medford and have two daughters, Kristen and Erin. In his spare time, Rand enjoys working in the garden, working on landscape designs for friends and neighbors, and designing and supervising landscape projects at his church.

Rand's e-mail address: rand.d.schledorn@state.or.us ■



## The new Worksite Modification Digest is here

by Barbara Smith

The digest is a 132-page book illustrating worksite modifications developed by injured workers, employers, insurers, private consultants, and Preferred Worker Program staff. It is meant to be a resource for people interested in finding solutions to the physical demands of a job. We hope it will give you ideas about how to modify a job to fit within your physical abilities. You can get a free copy of the *Worksite Modification Digest* by calling (800) 445-3948, ext. 7627, or (503) 947-7627. ■



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# Job search tips: attitudes that lead to a successful job search

by Barbara Smith

A positive attitude can be the key to finding employment. But it can be a challenge to maintain an optimistic outlook. Remember that you are not alone. Most people find themselves in this position at some point in their lives. If you find your attitude slipping, read these tips for remaining positive.

- Be open to the experience of looking for a new job. Although you may feel discouraged at times, this transition is a chance to start in a new direction. Because old routines are disrupted anyway, you can use this time to begin self-improvement practices such as diet and exercise programs. And remember, there may be pleasant, unanticipated benefits to an occupational change. Your overall well-being may improve.
- Focus on what you can control, and don't worry about what you can't control. You *can* control how you spend your time, what you are thinking about, how you take care

of yourself, and your appearance. You *can't* control other people's attitudes and prejudices. You *can't* please everyone all the time.

- Surround yourself with people who are supportive and honest with you. Avoid people with negative attitudes and those who believe you won't succeed. Talk regularly with those who are supportive and who see your best qualities.
- Expect to make many contacts and to hear "no" often. That happens to most of us when we are looking for employment. These aren't personal rejections. A "no" means this particular job isn't right for you at this particular time. Don't give up. You may not land your job until after the fifth or the fifteenth or the fiftieth try. Whatever the number, each try brings you one job closer to employment.
- See yourself as "available for work," not "unemployed." Thinking of yourself in this way affirms that you are ready and willing to work. That

is an attractive attitude that will be noticed by prospective employers.

- See your job search as a full-time job. Make a list of job-search activities for each day. Get up and get dressed each morning as if you were going to work. You need to focus on the activities that will help you meet your goal. And you need to be ready if an employer or another contact wants to meet with you.
- Follow up on the contacts you make. Many job-seekers' efforts don't bear fruit because they don't follow up with a phone call or letter. Every time you make a positive contact, your chances of getting a job increase.
- Expect to succeed. You'll eventually get what you give your attention to. So focus on what you want – success. Notice your small successes and celebrate them. Don't think about what you don't have or the things that didn't work out as you hoped. ■

## ... program rules *continued*

consultant's decision to complete the preferred-worker identification card and the wage-subsidy-agreement form and send them to the division.

The date on which the job starts will not be included as part of the 90-day period. If the ninetieth day falls on a Saturday, Sunday, or legal holiday, the next business day will be considered the end of the 90-day period.

### **Wage subsidy**

A wage subsidy is limited to 183 calendar days and may be interrupted once for reasonable cause.

A Preferred Worker's pay structure must be the same as the pay structure for other workers who have similar jobs with the employer.

### **Obtained employment purchases**

Obtained employment purchases are no longer provided for jobs outside Oregon.

Maximum total reimbursement for tuition, books, and fees is \$1,000.

Maximum total reimbursement for temporary lodging, meals, and mileage to attend instruction when overnight travel is required is \$500.

There is a new form (obtained-employment-purchase-agreement moving-assistance form) that you now use for a move. The employer is not required to sign the moving-assistance form.

Moving expenses are covered when the new job in Oregon is more than 50 miles from a preferred worker's primary residence. The Preferred Worker Program will no longer move workers out of state. Moving expenses will be reimbursed only for the worker.

Use of moving expenses is limited to once per eligibility period.

Rental allowance for a preferred worker's primary residence is limited to the first month's rent, a non-refundable deposit in an amount not to exceed the first month's rent, and a required credit check for that residence.

### **Worksite Modification**

Consultants have discretion to determine appropriate worksite modification based on reports from a medical provider specific to the worker, specific medical "best practices," and their own professional judgement and experience.

Modifications limited to \$1,000 may be provided when the consultant determines the modification would reasonably be expected to prevent further injury of the accepted condition.

Rented or leased vehicles and equipment will not be modified. ■

# Ergonomic Pneumatic Scissors *by Craig Sorseth*

## **Worker Disability:**

A 45-year-old auto upholsterer incurred osteoarthritis at the base of his right thumb. He was permanently restricted from repetitive forceful grasping with his dominant right hand.

## **Work Setting:**

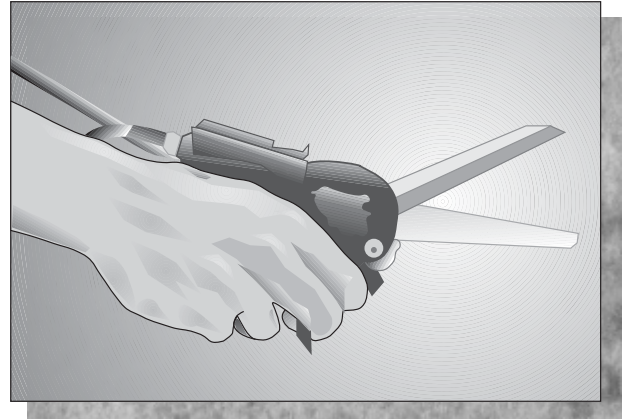
The worker was an upholsterer in a small auto upholstery shop. His tasks included repairing and replacing upholstery on auto seats, headliners, and door panels. He was frequently required to use scissors to cut patterns from a variety of materials and fabrics.

## **Obstacle:**

The worker was unable to exert sufficient force with his right hand to open and close the scissors as he cut heavy cardboard, felt, canvas, and other materials.

## **Modification:**

Although spring-loaded ergonomic scissors that open after a cut are available, the worker was still unable to perform repetitive grasping. He had tried electric rotary shears but found that they "bound up" with some of the heavy materials. The Preferred Worker Program consultant found ergonomic pneumatic scissors developed for the poultry industry to prevent carpal-tunnel injuries. These scissors are effective, lightweight (about 1.28 lbs.), and use standard 80-120 psi air. No force is required to open the blades, and less than one pound of pressure is required to make the cut. The blades are activated and



controlled by the finger loop. The thumb is not used for operation, but is allowed to rest in a neutral position. Easily interchangeable blades are available in multiple configurations for a variety of applications. The worker is now able to perform frequent, repetitive cutting without exceeding his permanent restrictions.

## **Cost of Modification:**

The pneumatic scissors and a set of interchangeable blades for cutting/puncturing canvas cost \$1,632, including shipping. ■

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